

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

West Point Products

West Virginia Manufacturing Extension Partnership

West Point Products Get Lean for Growth

Client Profile:

West Point Products (WPP), located in Valley Grove, West Virginia, is a re-manufacturer of printer and copier toner cartridges. The company recycles cartridges from various original manufacturers and sells their product to business supply centers and distribution centers. WPP serves a nationwide market and employs 120 people.

Situation:

WPP has been very successful and has grown steadily over the years. In response to new printing and copying technologies, the variety and number of new cartridges developed by the original manufacturers results in an ever-expanding remanufacturing market. This requires companies such as West Point to constantly develop new procedures and to expand their capabilities and their operations to keep pace with the market place. This constant evolution and expansion has created a stressful plant layout issue for West Point Products. This is also a very competitive industry that requires re-manufacturers to constantly cut cost, improve productivity, and improve delivery times to the customers.

During the process of reviewing the past growth of the company and developing a future growth plan, the management team at West Point Products realized they needed to address the productivity and layout issues of their facility. To begin this process they sent two employees to a Lean 101 training class to evaluate Lean Manufacturing concepts. After that event they contacted the West Virginia Manufacturing Extension Partnership (WVMEP), NIST MEP network affiliate, to arrange a meeting to discuss how they could integrate Lean into their operations.

Solution:

Consultants from the WVMEP met with members of the management team from West Point Products to discuss their business and evaluate their specific needs, based on the projected growth of the company. During the course of this discussion, there were two distinct problems identified by WPP for the WVMEP to address: 1) improve the operations at the current facility; and 2) develop a layout for a new facility that would meet short-term growth plans and provide adequate space for future expansions.

The WVMEP developed two packages of proposals that gave WPP different options for accomplishing these two goals. In a second meeting the options were discussed and a plan was put in place for a comprehensive improvement project. It had been decided that Lean Manufacturing would provide the tools necessary for WPP to make the needed improvements in their operations that would allow them to remain in the current location for a longer period. Also, these same tools would be used to develop a plan and layout for a new facility.

In phase one of the project, the WVMEP conducted the Lean 101 training class for a group of key employees to familiarize them with the concepts of lean and develop a team to address production problems. After this event was completed, a two-day Value Stream Mapping class and event was

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conducted with a smaller group selected from the participants of the Lean 101 class. After this phase, the group was asked by management to begin analyzing the plant and implementing changes based on the lean concepts.

In phase two of the project, the WVMEP worked with team members and management personnel to develop a list of requirements for a new facility. After this list was developed, the WVMEP consultants used this information in conjunction with good manufacturing practices to create a plant design and layout that would meet the short-term goals of the company and provide space for future expansion. Lean concepts were incorporated into this new design.

The WVMEP continues to provide support to WPP as they implement changes to their current operations, and develop further plans for the future of the company.

Results:

- * Core group of employees trained in Lean Manufacturing principles, to attack and solve productivity problems.
- * Core group of employees trained and experienced in the technique of Value Stream Mapping, to further enhance their operations.
- * Implemented changes to improve the current operations now and in the future.
- * Initiated a program to experiment with Lean concepts in the old facility, in preparation for implementation in a new facility.
- * Detailed plant layout is in place for the design and construction of a new facility that incorporates lean principles into the layout.

Testimonial:

"West Point Products has experienced substantial growth in our business over the past 12 to 18 months. We realized that changes would need to be made to accommodate this growth and allow us to continue providing good customer service and quick response to our customer's needs. We received an invitation to a Lean training class being offered by the WVMEP and decided to send two of our key employees to this class. They were impressed with the training and the information presented in this class and recommended that we expand this training to other employees in our plant. After meeting with the WVMEP representatives and discussing the services they could provide to us, we developed a plan for training and process improvement that would provide the tools needed to address our growth. The WVMEP personnel were very responsive to our needs and developed a package of service that met our immediate and long term planning goals. They have proven to be an excellent resource for training, information, planning assistance, and general support during this time of growth and expansion in our business. We look forward to working with the WVMEP as we continue the improvement and expansion of our operations."

Ron Dille, Director of Operations